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ABSTRACT

A review and a study of specific situations or movements show conditions that create stress for and between administrators and teachers. Today's emphasis on teacher accountability has created stress for teachers, chiefly because they feel they are being held responsible for things over which they have no control. The administrator can be of great help by strongly backing the teacher and working with the teacher on acceptable methods of discipline. There is also the feeling among teachers that they are held totally responsible for student achievement but have no control over other achievement-related factors, such as home environment, previous knowledge, and student background. Administrators must demonstrate that they fully understand these other factors. Administrators should also shield teachers from "meddling" parents. Teacher transfer and reduction in force can create severe anxiety, and administrators must make sure their actions are clearly understood by teachers and make any transition as smooth and untraumatic as possible. Lack of support from superiors seems to cause a great deal of stress, and teachers need administrators who are understanding, supportive, caring, and instructionally competent. Student violence is a problem on which teachers and administrators must work together with strong mutual support. Another tension/stress issue is that of evaluation. Teachers and administrators should view evaluation as a helping and supporting function, not as a threat. Outside pressure groups can cause friction and tension between administrators and teachers unless they are handled with the sense that together they represent an educational team and find a basis for agreement. The appendix to this paper lists rank orders of stress producing factors for teachers and administrators and ways in which the factors can be reduced. (JD)

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ESTABLISHING A CLIMATE FOR REDUCTION OF TENSION BETWEEN ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

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There are, obviously, many factors which create tension between administrators and teachers. Most prominent among these factors are those of which neither party perceives that they have some level of control. It is commonly accepted that when subjects have no control over a threatening, stressful situation, they experience increased anxiety.

Stress is a part of everyday living and every individual must constantly adapt to life stress. However, stress is relative to the people involved, the severity of the incidents, duration of stress factors, and role expectations among others. An individual person's biology, early experiences, psychological expectations and cultural influences are additional potent determinants of individual response to stress.

To say that the phenomenon of stress is a contemporary topic of interest is a vast understatement. There have been many studies relative to stress, but few, until recently, in the field of education. Most of the recent studies seem to have a common thread -- that too many administrators and teachers are spending a large portion of their time with a feeling of quiet desperation. They feel "out of control" and do not know where to find aid. Multiple exit surveys of teachers have indicated that one means of coping with the problem is by flight from the profession. In a recent survey of principals, 79 per cent indicated that a majority of stress factors was a direct result of their work setting. In another study conducted by the American Academy of Family Physicians, it was found that 66 per cent of teachers felt that their work environment was usually or always stressful, but 85 per cent indicated that they liked their work and the work environment. Teachers expect stress -- the question at this point becomes how much stress is productive and at what point does it become counter-productive?

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Some experts have listed five levels of stress to help ascertain the answer to this question. The levels are:

1. Short lived anxiety or tension.
2. Continuation of level (1) leads to a more chronic state of depression or fatigue.
3. The third level usually occurs during a prolonged period of the chronic state (2) which includes physiological changes such as elevated blood pressure.
4. Continued stress at the third level leads to more dibilitating physiological disorders including ulcers, coronary_, and psychosomatic disorders.
5. A behavioral response occurs. It is at this level that there is often a job performance decrement.

Additional findings include the conclusions that stress levels three through five may lead to physiological/psychological disorders such as depression, suicide, alcoholism, and sexual dysfunction.

Six major areas that create stress for teachers and/or administrators are chosen, on an arbitrary basis, for discussion in this paper. It is recognized that there are many additional factors which may create stress, and before beginning a discussion of the arbitrarily chosen areas some studies that have been completed concerning situations which create stress for teachers and administrators will be discussed.

STUDIES CONCERNING STRESS

Charles Dedrick, Richard Hawkes, and John R. Smith did a study in which teachers ranked a list of stressful conditions; one of the comparisons they made was males vs. females (Appendix A). On only three items do male and female teachers agree as to the exact rank order -- #9 - lack of input into curriculum/administrative decisions, #10 - lack of recognition for teaching excellence, #11 - lack of colleague support. There were others on which they were close to agreement. "Disruptive students" ranked #1 with males and #2 with females. "Student apathy" was #2 with males and #4 with females. #1 with females, "Lack of time" ranked #6 with males.

Swent and Gmelch developed a list of 35 stressful conditions and had a group of Oregon school administrators rank order them (Appendix B). Later Manera and Wright selected 12 of these they thought were the most important ones and had a group of New Mexico administrators rank order them. It was interesting to compare the rankings between these two groups of administrators.

Gmelch & Swent Study-Oregon	Manera and Wright Study - New Mexico
8.	1. Making decisions about people you know
4.	2. Evaluating staff members performance
	3. Imposing high expectations on myself
3.	4. Gaining public approval or financial support
6.	5/6. Tie -- Completing reports on time
	Handling student discipline
5.	7. Resolving parent/school conflict
1.	8. Complying with state/federal rules
2.	9. Spending too much time at meetings
10.	10/11. Tie -- Finding workload too heavy
	Speaking in front of groups
9.	12. Being interrupted by telephone
7.	Participating in school activities outside the normal working hours

Now, a review of some specific situations or movements that are creating stress, especially as they apply to conditions between administrators and teachers, and what can be done to create a better environment and therefore less stress for everyone.

ACCOUNTABILITY MOVEMENT

Today's emphasis on teacher accountability has created tremendous stress for teachers, chiefly because they feel they are being held responsible for things over which they have no control.

Student Discipline -- Most teachers do not believe they have the backing and support of the parents necessary to have good discipline. Often this is because a few very vocal parents are making complaints to the administration and openly criticizing teacher's disciplinary techniques to the public. The administration can help this situation tremendously by open communication with the teacher. Administrators should not leave the teacher "in the dark" about their decisions. Usually you inform the teacher they are correct and you are behind them 100 percent. This reduces the stress level for the teacher before it can build. If an administrator cannot stand behind the teachers, then he/she should work with the teacher on acceptable methods of discipline.

Student Achievement -- Teachers feel they are going to be held totally responsible for student achievement with very little consideration given to other factors over which they have no control -- background of student; previous knowledge; home and community environment - which is closely related to desire to learn. Administrators must demonstrate to teachers that they understand the different factors that contribute to a child's achievement level. They must educate the patrons concerning these factors and just what can be expected of teachers concerning student achievement.

Parental Pressure -- These are the situations that range from parental indifference to parental meddling. You can quickly see that there is a great deal of overlapping between the area of accountability and this area. Parental indifference is probably not as stressful as parental meddling, unless you are one of those teachers who worry a lot about how much your students are learning. Administrators need to have a good understanding of what the school is trying to accomplish, what the curriculum consists of, what activities the teachers carry out, what students are achieving, and then deal with patrons who try to "meddle" in the school's day-to-day activities. Teachers should be shielded from most parental "meddling."

"White Flight"

"White Flight" in a lot of cities is indirectly creating many stressful moments for a lot of teachers. Loss of students, resulting from many parents moving, eventually means a loss of teachers and/or transfers. Transfer policies and reduction in force policies must be clearly understood by everyone and followed. Every effort should be made to place teachers who must be released due to loss of students, in other districts of their choice. Also, programs should be operated which assist teachers who are being transferred, whereby the transfer is smooth and not traumatic.

Change in characteristics of student body which can be caused by "white flight" but could be caused by other factors is creating stress in many situations. The more teachers understand about the characteristics of their students and what to expect, the less stressful it will be to teach these students.

Dealing With Superiors

Lack of support from superiors seems to be causing a great deal of stress for educators.

1. Teachers view supervisors as of little help to them in coping with work related stress. In fact they are considered as a sourr of their stress.

2. For teachers, as well as executives, lack of appreciation is one of the most frequently cited sources of unhappiness at work.

3. Teachers need administrators who are understanding, caring, supportive, and instructionally competent.

4. Concerning stress, four of the five highest ranked events in a national study by administrators, concerned conflicts with teachers -- Forced resignations, unsatisfactory performance, preparing for a strike, and refusal to follow policies.

Student Violence

Related to lack of administrative support, but an area of importance in its own right is that of student violence. Tensions continue to increase between teachers and administrators regarding the degree of student violence that is occurring in our schools.

During the past five years, an average of 150-200 thousand cases of physical assault of a teacher by a student have been reported. Approximately 90% of these assaults have occurred in urban schools.

These and many similar factors indicate the frustration that teachers feel and evoke comments such as "administraotrs are unwilling or unable to deal with students who are trouble makers." "Violent students are not dealt with with any degree of severity." "A student who physically attacked me on Tuesday is back in school on Friday."

Some educators have looked to the legislature of the various states for additional aid, but corporal punishment laws have existed in 47 of the 50 states for some time. (New Jersey and Mass. prohibit corporal punishment by law and Maryland by a State Board of Education policy). Obviously, the answer does not lie completely or perhaps even partially with statutes and/or the courts.

In essence, teachers continue to voice their concern regarding the administrators knowledge of how to cope with, ability to deal with, or even fear of coming to grips with the problem of student violence. Consequently, teachers feel they are left to deal with the problem alone, and the frustration and anger of teachers continues to mount as the problem increases in scope.

EVALUATION

Perhaps no one single issue is more tension/stress related than the issue of evaluation. There is disagreement enough concerning whether the administrator should or should not be the primary evaluator.

In a study being completed by two professors at North Texas State University, administrators and teachers were surveyed concerning what functions are crucial to the successful performance of an administrator. A variety of functions, <u>including evaluation</u>, were submitted to administrators and teachers asking them to respond as to whether the function was a <u>Prerogative</u> (power or ability to act which is,

in your opinion, unchallengable, that is, not to be abrogated by anyone under any circumstances); Right (power or ability to act which is based on tradition or on moral or professional grounds. These may be arguable to some degree); and Privilege (Power or duty to act which you enjoy but for which there may be no educational or administrative basis. These can probably be lost without great real damage, but might lead to some loss of status or prestige). Ninety per cent of the Administrators responding indicate that the process of evaluation is a Prerogative. Only 26% of teachers perceive that this is a Prerogative. In fact, the majority perceive this area to be an administrative Privilege. Such a disparity in perception of function is indicative of the cause for tension in the area of evaluation between administrators and teachers.

Administrators statements include such expected responses as: "They want pay increases (or tenure/continuing contract) but they do not feel that any necessary competence, observable in nature, is necessary to present before professional evaluators" -- "They do not recognize that evaluation is a 'helping' function fulfilled by an administrator. They tend to percceive it as negative in too many instances." Teachers counter with "The only time I see an administrator is in a 'formal' 30 minute evaluation and then he/she asks me to sign a form." Teachers ask, "Is this evaluation?"-- and state that "The areas evaluated are archaic in nature. Real teaching isn't even a portion of the checklist that they fill out." These are not new concerns as you well know. However, the present concerns of education, including the necessity of exigency in some school districts tend to further exacerbate this stressor.

PRESSURE GROUPS

An obvious truism is that any administrator of any organization has a most difficult role as a change agent when the organization is compelled to make changes that are dictated by external groups and this includes those created by pressure groups. Such change may have more tension/stress related potential that any other work related stressor. However, response necessitated by any external organization, specifically in this case a pressure group, is more likely to occur in an educational institution than any other.

Briefly there are many types of pressure groups which might be illustrative --

1. Single or small groups of parents
2. Non-continuing larger pressure group
3. Continuing pressure group
4. Education as the primary focal point
5. Education as a secondary, tertiary, or even further removed focal point.

A listing of specific pressure groups would be much too long and of little value. Two illustrations might be sufficient.

1. Back to the basics
2. Anti-Humanistic movement

These types of pressure groups create not only a base from which educational decisions may be legitimately questioned but, in addition, often have enough appeal that a schism is created between groups of administrators and between groups of teachers. Consequently, any decision will inexorably alienate faculty-faculty, administrator-administrator, and administrator-faculty. Thus the pure definition of no-win conflict is inevitable.

Dealing With Administrator-Teacher Stress

There are many things that can be done to create an environment for the reduction of tension between administrators and teachers. Some of them are listed.

A. Leadership is essential to help teachers manage stress effectively.

1. Communicate with teachers what is expected of them clearly and specifically.
2. Unite the staff through a "we" approach. Do not rely on an "I am Boss" approach.
3. Establish and maintain a low conflict, low-stress climate emphasizing cooperation, not competition or continual confrontations.
4. When we have a stressful situation, isolate conflict to a specific issue or issues. Do not generalize the conflict to everyone and everything.
5. Discuss specific solutions to the problems. Provide for alternatives and build in feedback.

6. Promote and establish a climate that will assist faculty and staff members in dealing with pressures whether they be school connected or personal.

7. Review role expectations.

B. Answers to the following questions may provide a key to where a person can begin to reduce the stress they are feeling.

1. Do you keep yourself healthy and looking good?

2. What does your desk look like?

3. Is your office attractive?

4. Are you a slave to routine?

5. Do you procrastinate?

6. Can you resist the urge to keep busy?

7. Can you be passive and tranquil?

8. Do you buy into guilt?

9. Can you handle mean and stupid people?

10. Can you avoid worrying? Do what you can to solve a problem then you don't have to worry.

C. Conquerors of Stress

1. A rigorous physical fitness program.

2. Organization is an important factor in overcoming stress.

3. Experience on the job helps in managing stressful situations. "You learn to roll with the punches."

4. Participating in an outside interest that relaxes you -- arts and crafts, collecting things, growing things, nature and outdoor activities.

5. Support of coworkers, staff and community seem to be contributors to reducing stress.

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APPENDIX A

RANK ORDER AND MALE/FEMALE RANKINGS[1]

	Overall Ranking	Male Ranking	Female Ranking
1.	Disruptive Students	Disruptive Students	Lack of Time
2.	Lack of Time	Student Apathy	Disruptive Students
3.	Student Apathy	Financial Pressure	Nonteaching Duties
4.	Nonteaching Duties	Lack of Support from Parents/Community	Student Apathy
5.	Financial Pressure	Lack of Positive Feedback from Administrators	Lack of Support from Parents/Community
6.	Lack of Support from Parents/Community	Lack of Time	Financial Pressure
7.	Dealing with Multi-ability Students	Nonteaching Duties	Dealing with Multi-ability Students
8.	Lack of Positive Feedback from Administrators	Dealing with Multi-ability Students	Lack of Positive Feedback from Administrators
9.	Lack of Input into Curricular/Administrative Decisions	Lack of Input into Curricular/Administrative Decisions	Lack of Input into Curricular/Administrative Decisions
10.	Lack of Recognition for Teaching Excellence	Lack of Recognition for Teaching Excellence	Lack of Recognition for Teaching Excellence
11.	Lack of Colleague Support	Lack of Colleague Support	Lack of Colleague Support

RANK ORDER OF RESPONSES TO QUESTION --

List Three Things About Your Job That You Like

1. Working with students
2. Colleagues
3. Summer vacations
4. Student progress
5. Working hours
6. Subject matter
7. Freedom to implement
8. Varied workday
9. Helping others
10. Challenge

List Three Things About Your Job That You Don't Like[1]

1. Paperwork
2. Administration
3. Nonteaching duties
4. Low Pay
5. Parents/community
6. Student apathy
7. Discipline
8. Other teachers
9. No time to accomplish task
10. Work load

[1]Charles V. Dedrick, Richard R. Hawkes, John K. Smith, "Teacher Stress. A Descriptive Study of the Concerns," NASSP Bulletin, 65, No. 449 (December, 1981), p. 32.

If You Could Change Anything About the School Environment You Work In, What Would It Be?

1. Reduced paperwork
2. Stricter and consistent discipline
3. More teacher input
4. Reduce class size
5. Administrators who are organized and don't spring things on you
6. More communication between teachers and administrators
7. Home and school cooperation
8. Location and size of classroom
9. Carpeting
10. Greater cooperation among teachers

SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' TOP 10 STRESSORS[1]

1. Complying with state, federal, and organizational rules and policies.
2. Meetings taking up too much time.
3. Gaining public approval and/or financial support for school programs.
4. Evaluating staff members' performance.
5. Resolving parent/school conflicts.
6. Completing reports and paperwork on time.
7. Participating in school activities outside the normal working hours.
8. Making decisions affecting the lives of individual people I know (colleagues, staff members, students).
9. Being interrupted frequently by telephone calls.
10. Too heavy a workload; one that cannot possibly be finished during the normal work day.

[1]Walter H. Gmelch and Boyt Swent, "Stress and the Principalship: Strategies for Self-Improvement and Growth, "NASSP Bulletin, 65, No. 449 (December, 1981), p. 17.

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